

# *An important step to comply with the agreement*

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By María Josefina Arce

From November 21 to December 12 of last year, the first cycle of negotiations between the government of the Colombian President, Gustavo Petro, and the rebel ELN, National Liberation Army, took place in Caracas, the capital of Venezuela, in search of achieving total peace in a country bled dry by decades of armed conflict.

Several agreements were reached at this meeting, among them the implementation of humanitarian actions and dynamics in the communities affected by armed violence, for whose fulfillment the first steps

have already been taken.

Members of the negotiating table of the government and the ELN, together with representatives of indigenous organizations, community councils, the church and several UN agencies, formed the first humanitarian caravan to visit several indigenous and Afro-descendant communities in the Colombian Pacific.

From Bajo Calima, in Valle del Cauca, to the municipality of Medio San Juan, in Chocó, the caravan traveled to learn about the situation in these areas and seek to get these communities out of confinement or to allow them to return in a safe and controlled manner to their territories, in the face of forced displacements.

Valle del Cauca and Chocó are among the most affected Colombian departments. In recent months they have been the scene of an upsurge in armed violence between irregular groups disputing these territories.

A report by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs stated that from January to September of last year alone, 70 THOUSAND victims of forced displacement were reported, while more than 95,000 people were confined in Colombia.

The document specifies that one out of every two confined persons was indigenous, and one out of every four belonged to an Afro-descendant community.

A recent communiqué of the General Council of San Juan denounces that the Afro communities of that area of Chocó are going through a process of physical and cultural extinction due to massive and systematic violations of their human, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights.

The representatives of the government and the ELN talked with the inhabitants to know the situation of each territory and the urgent requirements of the communities.

In an informative bulletin, they stated that these areas require urgent attention from the institutions and Colombian society due to the seriousness of the situation, generated not only by the armed conflict, but also by the chronic neglect of the state, which has led to extreme violence and poverty.

Chocó is, for example, among the Colombian departments with the highest poverty rate. According to official data, more than 63% of its population lives in this condition.

The report resulting from this tour will be presented to the dialogue table, in order to coordinate actions. This is a first step of great importance to comply with what has been agreed and to continue advancing in the achievement of total peace, for which the government of President Gustavo Petro has bet on for the benefit of the entire Colombian society.

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